

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Iraq/Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons Learned

INTERVIEW #128

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INTERVIEW SYNOPSIS

Participant's Understanding of the PRT Mission

The interviewee, a Foreign Service Officer, served as the senior public diplomacy (PD) officer at Baghdad PRT, Iraq, from November 2009 to November 2010. He understood the PRT mission as to work to advance governance, rule of law, economic development and public health objectives to reinforce the security and stability gains made by the military. His role was to use public diplomacy tools and tactics to advance the PRT's objectives.

Relationship with Local Nationals

Observations: Relations with Iraqi officials, media, and the general public were open and positive. Most Iraqis that the interviewee met welcomed the PRT as a source of funding. Iraqi nationals working in the PRT's PD section were very talented and showed impressive dedication to their jobs.

Insights: He put heavy emphasis on getting local print and broadcast journalists to cover PRT projects -- a valuable outreach that had not previously receive high priority. Particularly useful was media coverage of USDA-supported agricultural activities in nearby rural areas.

Lessons: Security in Baghdad has improved to the point that he experienced no problems traveling with military escorts, either out in rural areas or in the crowded city streets. Lacking fluency in Arabic was a major frustration to him and a significant impediment to smooth communication with Iraqi contacts.

Did the PRT Achieve its Mission? (Impact)

Observations: The PRT had a positive short-term impact, but long-term accomplishments are difficult to measure and uncertain in durability. He was successful in drawing favorable attention to his PRT's projects and highlighting their value to Iraqis. He backed away from initiating new projects for media development for three reasons: the changing

nature of the U.S. presence in Iraq, the reduced availability of embassy Quick Response Program funding, and a local media market already saturated by previous training and other programs.

Insights: As long as the PRT continues to exist, a public diplomacy component will be necessary to publicize its activities, develop important media contacts and prepare the ground for its closure.

Overall Strategy for Accomplishing the PRT Mission (Planning)

Observations: His PRT was housed in the International Zone, while its military counterparts were at Camp Liberty. Despite this lack of co-location, overall civilian-military planning and operational coordination were strong. Specific PD objectives focused on the closing of Baghdad ePRTs (embedded PRTs) and the need to ensure continuing U.S. support for agricultural projects in the area and to sustain carefully-nurtured good relations with local officials.

Insights: For many months it was not possible to resolve policy differences over how to craft media messaging for the ePRT closings. Senior embassy officers considered the PRT drawdown a negative story and discouraged press releases related to it. He was convinced the subject could be handled in a straight-forward and ultimately positive manner, a position that eventually carried the day when the Office of Provincial Affairs got new leadership.

Lessons: FSI training was sufficient. The joint training with the military at the Army's National Training Center was especially valuable, both for the information provided and for the opportunity to become acculturated to military priorities and operational doctrine.

What Worked Well and What Did Not? (Operations)

Observations: On arrival he found that some civilians at the PRT outside the PD chain of command were handling PD functions such as cultural contacts and education exchanges. He was ultimately able to consolidate those disparate elements into one cohesive and more efficient public affairs operation.

Insights: Many outstanding civilians and military personnel were assigned to or supported the PRT including subject matter specialists and officers from other departments. The PRT became more efficient when it was no longer carried weak performers tolerated in an earlier period of over-staffing.

Lessons: Sometimes he felt estranged from colleagues who did not understand PD and why it was his job to ask them for details about what they were doing. He senses that in the hectic pace of events he picked up bad work habits that he will have to unlearn as he returns to a traditional Foreign Service posting.

THE INTERVIEW

Q. Would you say what you were doing in the PRT, where you were, and when you were there?

A. I'm a Foreign Service Officer. Technically, going to Baghdad was my third overseas assignment, my third tour. I was TDY there from [a western European embassy]. My position was the Public Diplomacy Section Chief for PRT Baghdad from the end of November 2009 until the end of November 2010.

Q. What is your understanding of the mission of the PRT itself, and within that PRT, what was your own specific mission?

A. The mission of the PRT as a whole as I understood was to support and reinforce the gains that had been made during the period of the surge in terms of the security and governance of Baghdad province and the stability of the province.

The PRT in Baghdad started in 2006 and then expanded to include the embedded PRTs as the military stood up even more into Baghdad. The initial goal certainly was to follow the stabilization aspects of development, to reinforce the gains that had been made in the security situation by reinforcing the government's ability to do its job. In terms of what we put in our press releases as to what the PRT in Baghdad did, we worked to strengthen rule of law, we worked to promote economic opportunities [and] in governance. Those were the three main areas. We also worked in public health as well in trying to improve the ability of the Iraqi government to respond to the needs of the people of Baghdad province – and also serve the goals of the U.S. government in Baghdad, as well by fostering improved relations with provincial officials and gathering of information and reporting to allow our constituents at the embassy and in Washington to have a better understanding of what was going on in Iraq's most important city.

Q. How would you characterize your relationship with the Iraqis you dealt with in the PRT and beyond?

A. I would say both were extremely positive, for different reasons. The staff that worked for us were immensely talented people, some of whom were able to go on, to move to the United States [presumably receiving a Special Immigrant Visa]. Some of them are still making those plans, but their depth of experience, their dedication to their job was just extremely impressive. Day-to-day threats that they faced – I'm not sure if they're anywhere near as severe as they were at one time – people moved to and from the city. It's not easy to get through the checkpoints and to get to work, but almost uniformly they do, and they did. There were occasional problems, but many of the staff were not hesitant to show to the public at large that they were affiliated with us. We had one or two in particular who were not shy about having to go both in public before provincial government officials or through the media or serving in translative roles or otherwise being identified with us.

In terms of our relations with Iraqis in general, again, I would say they were very positive and for two different reasons. For our regular contacts, provincial governmental officials, meetings that I saw, we had developed a depth of a relationship that allowed us to have open doors pretty much where we wanted to go: the provincial government level, the governor's office, the mayor's office. We were able to get in the door and take the meetings and have a kind of open relationship with those individuals that are a building block or a foundation of diplomatic work. In terms of the more general public at large, I would say our relations were also equally good, partly because we'd been there so long. The people who knew what a PRT was came to expect it. We were the ones bringing money, or we were the ones bringing gifts, and therefore we were always welcomed. Even if we weren't bringing gifts, there was always a positive reaction.

My day-to-day relationships were primarily with the media. When we were a two-person office, I tended to take the information officer's side of the house, so I was working on ways to tell the PRT story in the local media and found those also to be very positive. We had not been doing much of that prior to my arrival, and so there was an eagerness on the part of the Iraqi media to report on the PRT and what we were doing – partly because they knew we were there but they hadn't heard from us in a long time, and so they were curious what we were doing. I think also, frankly, they were tired of reporting on politics. Coming to the embassy is to hear the Ambassador hold forth on the state of affairs on the national level. Working primarily with the broadcast media and television in particular – they want to see things. They want to see progress or projects or activity, and they knew if they came to us, they could see the results of some of what the U.S. government was doing in Baghdad, so there was an interest there from them on that. I think we were mostly successful in both getting the attention from the Iraqi media for what we were doing but also communicating the messages that we were trying to communicate.

Q. Was most of your contact with the Iraqi media onsite at the PRT, or by phone or by email, or through your going out into media institutions, or meeting with the media in offsite locations?

A. The majority was meeting with them in offsite locations. We had a few events that took place at the Rasheed Hotel, which is in the international zone but was the site of a training opportunity or something that we wanted the media to cover. We occasionally had media come to events at the PRT, although getting them onto FOB (forward operating base) Prosperity, where we worked inside the Green Zone, was not easy. Sometimes we would meet them inside the IZ (International Zone) and then take them on to the embassy or take them on to the PRT to interview somebody or something like that. But the majority of contacts were out in the field. I'd say a majority of the work we did with the media dealt with agricultural issues – ironically enough – because our focus as a PRT was very much in the rural communities outside of central Baghdad and the work that our USDA advisors were doing there. We didn't hesitate to ask the media to go to a rural area and meet us there and see whatever program it was we were trying to put forward that day. And they came on their own. We weren't necessarily providing them transportation; we weren't necessarily providing them security. We said, "Meet us here."

Sometimes they would argue and say, “Oh, we don’t want to go there. It’s not safe,” but they always came. I attribute some of that to the interest they had in what we were doing and some of it to the effectiveness of the BBA (bilingual bicultural advisor) that we had working in public diplomacy who had been in Iraq for seven years, I think, working with the U.S. government in different capacities. She had developed her relationships with the Iraqi media to such an extent that she was dealing with individual reporters, but she knew their bosses. She was able to apply pressure that almost always moved the way. She was very effective in that role, and we took advantage of her.

Q. When you traveled to these places, you went with as part of a movement covered by the military?

A. More often than not, although not always. In the PRT in Baghdad we benefited from both RSO (Regional Security Officer) movements as well as military movements. So often it depended on where we were going. The RSO would support moves of a few miles within (range of) the embassy proper, so if we were doing something at a museum or at the provincial government building, very often we would travel in their protective...

Q. The civilian contractor?

A. Yeah. Exactly. But we also had the option of having military movements within the city because under the Security Framework Agreement they were allowed to transport diplomats within city boundaries. Sometimes that caused confusion among Iraqi security forces – “Why are the Americans in? They’re not supposed to be here” – but if we had the right passes, then they would always let us through. Movements were never really much of an issue.

Q. When you went out to agricultural sites you had the full military entourage? Was that an impediment to your interactions with the local officials, farmers, or media?

A. Not really, because the time when I arrived was sort of the last chapter of the PRTs. The ePRTs (the embedded PRTs) were starting to close, and they had really already been doing a lot of work in these rural areas, and they moved exclusively through the military. So they were comfortable with seeing the Americans arrive in MRAPs or Humvees (tactical vehicles), and that was not an unusual sight for them. If anything, traveling with some of these soldiers inside the city, they would say to us, if they were on a second or third tour, how surprised they were at what we were doing – driving in the middle of traffic, in bumper-to-bumper traffic in Baghdad, in traffic circles with cars all the way around us. They were having trouble getting their heads around it, because in their prior tours it was if anyone came within 100 yards that was a threat. Now, again, I’m used to it, because that’s my reality and that’s what we do in other countries: we travel in the traffic. We were doing that in Baghdad in our military vehicles by the time I arrived.

Q. Were there any specific outcomes you were looking for in terms of your interactions with media people; training programs or anything else in the public diplomacy area?

A. I did a couple of things upon my arrival based in part on my predecessor and where we were going, and also based on consultations with the embassy's Regional Coordinator for Public Affairs who oversaw the PRT public diplomacy efforts nationwide. One was to create a clear structure within the PRT's PD program that there was a cultural side and an information side, and that these would be clearly delineated so the embassy would have an easier time matching our efforts. We did that early on.

The other thing I did very consciously was to back away from projects. My predecessor is an excellent officer and was the grant writing officer for the PRT for much of his last year there. He was there for several years. He was very project-focused. This is the period when money was flowing very aggressively, and so his mindset was very much on media development, whether it was supporting programming, supporting independent broadcasters, training opportunities, things like that. He did an awful lot of that, and I think that really kind of saturated the market. With my arrival, there was a period leading up to the elections where the QRF funding (Quick Response Fund) that the embassy provides through U.S. Embassy Support Funds (ESF) or USAID funding, wherever the funding treats come down from, there was a bit of a slowdown, where OPA (Office of Provincial Affairs) said: "You can submit projects to us, but we may take our time in approving them, because we're getting ready for the elections. We don't know how much of the funding that we have on hand will be needed to support the election process." So for a period of time there was kind of a "go slow" on projects and during that assessment we just didn't do any. We were able to be effective without spending any money. The embassy makes a lot of money available. We were aggressive with International Visitor Leadership Programs (IVLPs). We were very aggressive with other training opportunities, some that just used what we had at hand – [like] working with the embassy's English language teachers to bring in elementary and secondary school English teachers in Baghdad schools for training programs, because they were low-cost. They were done in the embassy's dining hall. We would feed them and we'd have a two day program, and they'd learn some modern pedagogy on how to teach English that doesn't involve beating the students and rote memorization. Some of these other things are base level contacts in public diplomacy work. I credit my colleague with that; she was really an expert and had served the prior year in Iraq in the embassy. She knew a lot of these same people, and she was very adept at bringing together the many different elements that you find in the terrain and matchmaking, basically. She was very good at that, so we were able to accomplish a lot of things without spending much money at all.

Getting the media to cover our events is free, once you pay for the movement team. It's just some paper and some email, and you're getting a lot of attention in a very large media market that way. There wasn't a need to grease the wheels at that point. I implemented a few QRF projects that my predecessor had left behind, including a production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with a local production company, which was kind of interesting. It took place when I was on R&R (vacation) with some journalism training with an NGO, but I only wrote one myself – at the very end of my year that I actually put forward a QRF project.

Q. Looking back at your interaction with the Iraqis, is there anything that could have

made the interactions more effective than they already were?

A. Language training. That was far and away my biggest frustration, that I did not have any Arabic. An inability to speak directly to the reporters was very frustrating for me. I understood the reality. There's no way that I could have been brought to a level of fluency that I would have liked, but it just makes it very hard. Many of these folks have learned some English over the years, and they've been working with us so long, but you can't really communicate nuance or even basic information. I was really reliant on translators, and that only can go so far.

Q. Did you have social events associated with what you were doing where you got to know people on a personal level? How much of that was there and how well did it go?

A. There was some of that. I don't know the exact number of public events that we held where we brought the media on. As you start to see the same reporters more than once, there's a level of familiarity that builds. I got to know toward the end of my year, a reporter for Al Baghdadia who was actually profiled in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. He hosted a show on the mornings where he stood on street corners and just did man-on-the-street interviews: "What's your frustration today?" It became very popular. It was a place for people to air their grievances against the government. He was always getting beaten up. He was always having a hard time getting his work done, so he gained some notoriety by it. We got to know him pretty well. He's going to go on an IVLP this year, an exchange program to the States. He still thinks of America as an occupier, but he got to know us a little bit; we got to know him.

Q. So you had meals with him sometimes?

A. He came to the embassy on a couple of occasions. You couldn't really see people socially, but you build up a rapport in other ways. We were able to get him to the embassy for a meeting with one of the embassy's Arabic media officers to talk about the aftermath of the government shutting their station down. After the church attack on Halloween, they were one of the stations that broadcast the demands of the hostage takers at the Christian church, and within hours, the government had shut them down, closed their doors. So there were questions of censorship, a lot of interest in Washington, and we were able to bring them in and say, "Meet us. Let's talk." We were able to do that.

Q. Speaking of impact, to what extent did the PRT that you were in overall achieve its mission, and what about the PD side of things?

A. I'll start with ours. Because I'd set these narrow goals, I think we achieved what we wanted. We were able to restructure. We were able to successfully promote the PRT's work, to put forward messages in the transition period when ePRTs were closing throughout the city and throughout the province. We were able to say, "Look, the ePRT in Medina is closing, but that doesn't mean that our relationship with the people of Medina is ending. Here's how we're going to go forward." We did that very successfully in Taji on a last-minute kind of arrangement, when the PRT there was officially closing

but was remaining as a smaller office of PRT Baghdad. We had four broadcasters out there that day. They covered some of the projects that our agriculture advisor had set up. They came together for sort of a farewell ceremony with the team leader and members of the staff, some Iraqis, a public health figure [who] was there to talk. It was a successful event put together on very short notice that I think hopefully will serve some lessons learned going ahead as the embassy looks to close PRTs countrywide – that there are ways to bring the media in advance to talk about PRT closure and not have it seem like a failure, not have it seem like we’re abandoning the country, but – to use the cliché – the normalization of a bilateral relationship. We were able to get a lot of those messages out.

As far as the PRTs’ efforts, coming in at the end of their life cycle, I think there’s a belief that they have achieved much of their goals. There is increased stability, but it’s tenuous. There are improved relationships between Iraqi central provincial government officials and rural representatives of these rural districts because we helped facilitate these relationships. However, having said that, it’s tenuous yet. I think the naysayers or those with a more pessimistic view aren’t sure that the gains are solid, and feel that the PRT effort needs to continue to maintain those relationships and to give more momentum to the development of those relationships. My sense is that at some point you have to cut the cord and kind of step back, and perhaps this is as good a time as any. I think the hardest thing to do is to put measureables or metrics on whether PRTs work. If you look at stability in government efficiency and some of those things, I think we have been successful. Places where we were the ones responding to bombings, responding to the needs of citizens, and spreading money around to achieve those goals – we’re not doing that anymore. The Iraqi government and its local government are providing those services. Maybe not well, maybe not perfectly, but they’re starting to fill those roles, and we’re not.

We had a congressional delegation of staff come to us with a somewhat skeptical view of the effectiveness or the worth of PRTs. One of the incisive questions they asked us: “Well, how do you know this worked?” That’s a hard question to answer because when we started the baseline was zero. The baseline was ineffective government; nothing was going on. Now we’re here, but to say that’s strictly because of our activity? I don’t know you can really make that argument. It’s a chicken and egg kind of thing. I think we helped fill some of the void, but did the cessation of sectarian violence take place because the PRTs were there and making everybody happy with little presents for local officials, or had they bled themselves dry and [perpetrators of the violence] sat back and said, “We need to put a stop to this,” and one reinforced the other? It’s hard to say. Nobody there was measuring metrics at the beginning. We tried along the way. I don’t know how successful PRTs were in doing that. A lot of it was self-identified measuring sticks: “The government is paving road, so now we move this up to ‘Sustainable’.” In the earliest days, we were too busy just keeping the lights on and the money flowing and all these other things. Nobody was thinking about those things back then, so it’s hard to accurately say how effective they were, other than to just sort of step back and look at the impressionistic painting from a broader perspective and say, “Well, it looks more like something I can recognize now.” The PRTs may have had something to do with that.

Q. As the PRT winds down and the American military presence winds down, is there less of a need for a PD component at the PRT level in Baghdad since there is already a large PD office in the embassy?

A. I think there should be a PD component, even if it's minimal, as long as the PRT exists. The embassy's focus is always going to be national. You need somebody there to focus on the local.

Q. As long as the PRT is engaged in rule of law and governance and development and health and agricultural programs?

A. Yes. And we were also the ones that supplied the embassy with its contacts. I think to an extent that that's still true. The PRTs in Basra, in Baghdad, name your province, were the ones providing candidates for exchange programs and providing the contacts for the events that these embassy is now holding. They're trying to finally build a database of who everybody is in the country, so you need somebody there to continue that work, but also to prepare the ground for the closure, and say, "We're not going to be here forever. This is what that means. This doesn't mean that we're disappearing for good, but you shouldn't expect to be able to wake up in the morning and find an American ready to meet with you at your request. Here's how you work through the embassy at Baghdad or through the consulate in Basra or Erbil."

Q. Did you have a chance to meet with your successor and what advice did you give?

A. I did. It was an unusual situation because it was a two-person office and had been for a long, long time. When I arrived, there were two of us. My colleague curtailed in April, about four months in. She was a Foreign Service Specialist transitioning into an officer position, and so she curtailed to go to [another country] to take a job in cultural affairs there, which left us without a second person until her replacement arrived, which was in September. Her replacement then overlapped with me until I left at the end of November. My position was never backfilled, so when I left we were transitioning down to a one-person office. We had basically a two-and-a-half-month overlap, and so we had a lot of time to work together. She got a chance to see what we were doing and how we were doing things. Because my colleague had curtailed, I had to step back from a lot of what we were doing already to reflect that there was only one of me, especially as we were going through the peak season of nominating and processing visitor programs and some of those other things. That became my main cultural focus. I wasn't able to do much with artists or some of these other things that we were doing. Fortunately, we had other people at the PRT who were plugged into those communities. We had a special advisor for cultural outreach who worked in an entirely different office than mine and who had built over his time at the PRT and his prior service at the embassy's Public Affairs Office a rather extensive list of contacts in the visual/performing arts communities and also in the cultural heritage domain – working with museums and those sorts of things. Part of the communication struggles that we had was trying to make sure that everything was integrated, because when I arrived the PD component of the PRT was spread everywhere. There were people doing education work who were working on their own side. There

were people doing cultural outreach who were working for another supervisor, and then there were a few people doing PD work who were reporting up through another chain of command. It was awkward, and it was awkward for the embassy. It was awkward for the PRT. It was a big part of my first few months was the consolidation of these disparate elements into one cohesive section.

Q. About planning, how were the priorities of the PRT established – in terms of higher authorities and civilian-military relations – and what was your role within that?

A. As the section chief, I attended the regular morning staff meetings that we had and certainly had an open door to go to the division-level meetings that the PRT had, for the working group, the non-lethal targeting meetings, the military's way to talk about everything they were doing that didn't involve security – the soft-power aspects of what they do. My observation overall was that the division that was partnered with us for the longest period that I was there were excellent. Their two-star commanding general had a very good understanding of interagency work and was very supportive of the PRT Baghdad team leader and what he was trying to do. The two of them had a very good working relationship. They understood each other, they supported each other. We are unusual as a PRT in that we are one of the few in Iraq that wasn't co-located. The division staff was all out at Camp Liberty, out near the Baghdad International Airport. We were inside the International Zone, so anytime we wanted to meet with them face to face, we had to get in helicopters and fly out there, whereas most PRTs are co-located with their military component and have a much closer day-to-day working relationship. We did not.

From the public diplomacy perspective, the public affairs officer was very supportive. He had spent a lot of time in Afghanistan prior to coming to Baghdad. He understood how PRTs worked. We were going through the changes I described, where we had a staff at the peak of I think six or seven people, plus some local employees doing PD-related work, too. [He] was always willing to share staff, to offer the support we needed when we needed it to do press events, get internal USG coverage of things, [or] send a military public affairs officer out to cover an event. Towards the end, especially at the New Dawn period, we found straight from USFI (U.S. Forces-Iraq) down, there was a greater interest in those kinds of stories. As the military was trying to report back home on what New Dawn meant, we had from division, from U.S. Forces, and from Armed Forces Network Three different sets of military reporters who wanted to come cover our events, just to ride along and record whatever we were doing. There was a lot of interest in that.

The planning between the military and the civilian side was close, as close as you could expect, all things considered. The division commander stayed away from civilian leaders in Baghdad unless the Baghdad PRT leader felt like his presence would be helpful. They did have meetings with the governor and others out at the U.S. Division-Center headquarters. USDC was very supportive of our efforts to take the governor and the provincial council chair and others, using military assents, to more far-flung parts of the province that they might not go to otherwise – to help make these introductions that I mentioned before between urban power brokers and rural provincial leaders, who are

closest to the people. Baghdad politics and governance is such that the governor is actually responsible for providing essential services in these rural areas, where in Baghdad central, there's another person who is the sort of mayor or city manager of Baghdad who provides those things. He doesn't report to the governor at all, although his budget, I think, comes from the governor and the provincial council. He is actually considered of ministerial rank, he's appointed by the Prime Minister. So you have these competing different interests in the agenda, and what we were trying to do is link these provincial-level figures with rural politicians.

One of the things we went through as a planning process was we were losing staff throughout the winter and expecting to lose many more. We were trying to figure out how do we do less with less – what less do you do, and how do you do it? Essentially, a two-headed focus is what I saw. One was in agriculture. We knew we were going to have USDA advisors throughout Baghdad through the foreseeable future – so how do we support their efforts? And the other part was governance linkages to leverage the relationships that the ePRTs had built at the local level with the provincial-level relationships that PRT Baghdad had built. Those were the two main areas of focus that I saw from our team leadership that they were trying to accomplish, and I think we were successful.

Q. To what extent did the training that you received prepare you for the work you were doing in Iraq?

A. I think as well prepared as you can be. Until you get somewhere, you never really know what you need. I found that the rotation that I did at the National Training Center in California, the NTC rotation, was very helpful. This is where they take an outgoing brigade combat team – that is, an advise and assist brigade – that's going through its last formal training before they deploy. They bring in State Department and USAID who are deploying to be PRT members to participate in this training rotation, usually about seven to nine days. There are aspects of it that I thought are dated. The scripts were a little too kinetic. The emphasis was more on the instability and the crises and the combat operations and a little less on the development side. But all things considered, as an introduction to how the military works and the military thinks, invaluable for me. I thought that was a very good experience – from sleeping on the cots 20 to a room to riding in dusty Humvees around the desert near Barstow. It was a very good exposure to what Iraq would be like, so I had very good feelings about that.

The courses at FSI were very helpful as well. I don't think they were too long or too little; it was about right. I think many of the presenters who were brought in to give lectures were quite helpful. The ones who had really been there and understood the country well were very effective. Some of the academic sessions less so, although it's helpful to know the history and some of these things. You can get those from a book, and some of the speakers were more dynamic than others. The FACT (Foreign Affairs Counter Terrorism) training that we do, the training that we do for defensive aggressive driving, shooting a gun, first aid, the diplomatic security course – I don't know. I guess it was helpful, but I'm not sure how much I retained from that week that would serve me

well in a crisis. If I had to pick up a gun, I'm not sure I would really know what to do with it still. I think the driving components were helpful but probably less so in Iraq and more so in a high-crime, high-threat post down the road where I may be actually driving and see some bad guys on the road who want to rob me and try to figure out what to do – less so when I'm riding in the back seat of an MRAP and something were to happen – the driving skills would be very helpful there for the most part.

Q. Back to planning, did you get the inputs that you needed from the higher PD people in Baghdad? From the Office of Provincial Affairs?

A. Probably more so from the embassy PD section. There was an OPA desk officer who had a PD portfolio, but was not a major part of my day-to-day interaction. The head of the embassy's Office of Regional Public Affairs was my conduit to the embassy, but – let's face it – I lived there, if I needed to come to the embassy Public Affairs Office, I walked down the street and walked in there. For the most part there was good support.

My biggest frustration from my year, other than my inability to speak Arabic, was a bureaucratic – it wasn't a nightmare, but there was a definite problem in messaging. The embassy front office (Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission), the Public Affairs Office, nobody was really sure how to message PRT closures. There were some talking points, but they were very general. When it actually came to these things happening, they didn't know what to do. It was viewed by the OPA leadership at the time as a bad news story, I think. It was viewed as negative; undercutting the message that we're ramping up our diplomatic presence, not scaling it back. Well, the fact of the matter is: no, we're losing hundreds of positions over the next 18 months from people who are working throughout the country. Yeah, we're adding some police trainers, and the embassy may be a little bit larger, but we're also still closing 18 PRTs. During my time in Iraq, we closed the ePRT Northeast; ePRT East went away; ePRT West, North, South. We were closing ePRTs. I wrote a press release to mark the closure of ePRT East, thanking everybody for all that they did, just a press release, using the messaging that had already been handed out to us: what PRT closure would mean, incorporating all that in. It was a good press release. I showed it around to the embassy PA office and went upstairs to the front office (Ambassador and DCM) and it just died, because there was a bureaucratic inertia on the question of how do we tell this story in such a way that it's positive? So, full stop, no press release; it was never approved, never issued. So ePRTs just sort of went away. That happened again with ePRT West.

Then when ePRT North was getting ready to close, there was a change. The team leader was very supportive of doing something, and she and the new OPA director at that point got together. What was going to be just a social barbeque turned into an actual public diplomacy strategy, a closure plan, where we tried to consolidate two or three different activities that I had planned. I started doing this in December – how do we close the PRT? What elements would we put into a PRT closure – a media roundtable? I saw the writing on the wall; I wasn't going to be the one to turn off the lights, but I was going to be the next-to-last one out the door, and this was going to be happening under my watch, so how do we do it? Do we have the media in for a roundtable to talk about what the

PRT's done, take the media out to projects, and have a closing ceremony? This is what the military does very well. When they closed one of their joint security stations, when they closed one of their Forward Operating Bases in Baghdad, they made a big deal out of it for security reasons. They wanted it to be clear to the enemy that they were not ceding territory. This was part of a normal planned strategic process of consolidation and fulfillment of the bilateral agreement that we had with the government of Iraq. I was trying to take the same approach with the public diplomacy side. It never went anywhere until July, when a few individuals, particularly the team leader of ePRT North at the time, really pushed. The OPA director wanted to do it, the team leader wanted to do it, we wanted to do it, but even at that point there was resistance in the Public Diplomacy section at the embassy until the team leader went and – I don't know this to be true, but I assume she read the Riot Act to a few people and said, "No, we'll do this," and they said, "Okay, try it." We threw it together at the last minute because, of course, this decision didn't come until about two days before. You have to plan movements out that far in advance, so it was very much done in the last minute. But I think, considering our goals, it was successful. It could have been repeated, and it could have been done in a more plain fashion had there been a blessing earlier on and we had time to really cultivate – "Okay, today we're going to do this, and this will be the focus, and tomorrow we'll do this. Then we'll do this" – these different things they planned. So we'll see.

Q. Were there regular meetings of the PRT officers or the PRT PD officers as a group with the central PD office?

A. There were conference calls usually every other week when a certain officer headed the embassy PD section. He had biweekly conference calls that were better than not having any. They served to help keep us more consolidated, and I thought in general, we were cohesive as a group. Most of the PD officers were Foreign Service Officers. The embassy PD officer had held a session before I arrived where they got to meet each other and had meetings with officers. He did a pretty good job of coordinating that. People who were there longer said that that never even happened prior to his arrival, so there was a better effort to keep the PD section on the same page.

Q. It sounds like your conversations by conference call were more operational rather than planning and critique sessions where you might have talked about the public affairs strategy of closing ePRTs.

A. Well, we were the only ones really focused on it at the time, because all those PRTs weren't going away at that point. Most of them are closing now; they'll be closing this year. That wasn't so much their focus. A lot of times those meetings would be dominated by somebody who had a complaint. They would get up and sort of filibuster and the rest of us would hold the phone away from our ear and wait for them to finish: "Oh, we don't have enough staff," or "Oh, this or that is a frustration." They were helpful for coordinating some things along the lines of how to get your slate of nominees for International Visitor Leadership Programs together – "Here's the new person at the embassy who's handling this issue. Introduce yourself" – things I was able to do in person. For people who were in far-flung areas I think that they were probably more

helpful than they were for me, because I could go to these people directly if I needed to. Being co-located, it was easy.

Q. In other operational dimensions, what worked well and what were the major impediments in accomplishing your day-to-day missions and day-to-day activities?

A. What worked well: The people who worked there who were really talented, truly dedicated and experienced. The people who had time on the ground, real expertise in their subject matter, a real focus on mission and dedication to getting the job done. I worked with some people there who were as impressive as any I've ever worked with, both FSOs and 3161s (subject matter experts). We had a health advisor who was a former military medical practitioner – just brilliant, very focused. We were lucky to have him – very effective in what he was doing. Those people shined. When PRT Baghdad was large and bloated, there were a lot of people who could have disappeared tomorrow and nobody would have noticed. They were just along for the ride. As long as the budget wasn't a concern and size wasn't a concern, these people sort of tagged along and could be brought out when needed to do something. There are a lot of different examples I could bring up – people who have a very narrow focus or a personality that lent itself [only] to certain kinds of engagements, the respected person, the conduit. You could have those people [then, but] we didn't have that luxury as we were reducing in size. They are less effective.

There are frustrations in moving sometimes. Missions would be canceled for reasons that were less than clear. People would be frustrated by that. I didn't do a lot of missions on my own. I was always a tag-along, so I didn't have a lot of that. I had a few things canceled for various reasons towards the end, but that's part of life in a place like Baghdad. Those things happen. I think people who had a positive attitude made the place work. People who lost focus or who focused on the bureaucratic hassles wasted inordinate amounts of time over bureaucratic infighting. That didn't work as well.

Q. How about cultural sensitivity issues? Were there any particular cultural sensitivity problems that arose while you were there?

A. There were probably a few. I don't know if I can bring up any really vibrant examples. I did see overt hostility towards our host country or nationals, but they were people who were there too long. There were people who were jaded or who were pessimistic, or who took a negative view towards things. But I also ran across people, not Foreign Service Officers, who were attuned to being culturally sensitive, who spoke more Arabic than we did – who took upon themselves to learn the language, learn the customs, learn how to greet a man who you don't want to kiss on the cheek but you still want to show respect to – and knew those things, where I didn't. Those things were quite impressive, and there was a lot of that. People who knew how to greet the kids in the streets when we were out walking around places. Those things leave a positive view. Some of our military colleagues, the guys in our movement teams, were the best at that, too. They didn't get outside the wire at that point any more than we did, but they were very good at interacting with kids and being good ambassadors for the United States and for the

American people.

Q. Are there any other comments you would like to share about your experience at the PRT, how it worked, and how it could have been made more effective?

A. I don't think I'll ever have another experience in the Foreign Service quite like it. I know it's not normal State Department life. In some ways there were good aspects to it, and in some ways I always felt a fish out of water. Some of the anti-State biases that you would see, I didn't let them bother me, but other people were bothered by them. Those who had DOD and different military backgrounds would get frustrated by us and our consensus style of approaching a problem, rather than a top-down style. The only other thing I would say about it is to compare it to my first tour in Africa where we were junior officers supervising other junior officers and doing consular work and economic work without a lot of supervision. Everything was just rushing at you at 110 miles an hour, and you're doing the best you can to handle the problems as well as you can within regulations that you're presented. Invariably you missed things and picked things up and developed bad habits. Then you go into a second tour in (a western European country) where your local staff had been there 30 years and they know the FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual) better than you do, and they know exactly how everything should be done, and you unlearn your bad mistakes, and you correct things you were doing wrong and you do certain other things better and broaden your experience. To me the PRT was kind of like that first experience, where everything is coming at you at 110 miles an hour, and you have colleagues that don't know what public diplomacy is, who didn't have an officer at their PRT asking them "What are you doing?" so that we can help promote it or talk about it, either back home or in the local media. They didn't know what to think of me. I was an alien to them – "Leave me alone and let me do my projects and stop bothering me." It took a while to develop those relationships. Just the work itself is different, and so going forward to another assignment in an embassy with a normal structure and a public affairs officer and two assistants working, I think I'll unlearn my bad mistakes and bad habits and see things in a more normal environment, but I'll always have a favorable view of my time in Iraq. It had its frustrations, but I think in the end it was rewarding and I'm glad I went.

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